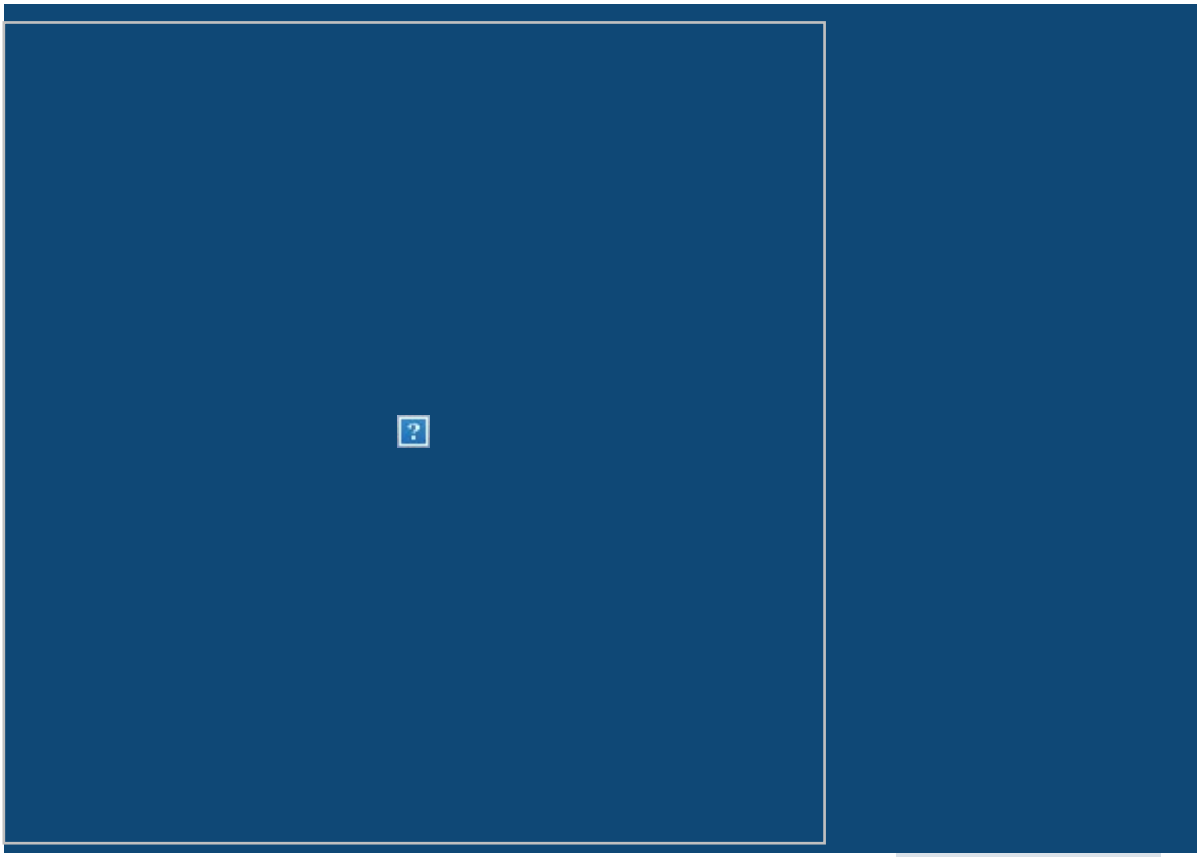
From: Elizabeth Morra
To: Christy Agner
Subject: Weekly Federal Recap for January 16, 2026
Date: Friday, January 16, 2026 11:03:29 AM



January 16, 2026

Weekly Federal Recap

A weekly update on federal legislative topics impacting higher education.

Senate Clears Another Three-Bill Minibus; Bills Head to President for Signature (Courtesy Politico and other sources)

- Three more spending bills are headed for President Donald Trump's desk for signing after the Senate passed a three-bill minibus package yesterday afternoon before leaving for a week-long recess.
- Lawmakers voted 82-15 to approve the legislation funding the departments of Justice, Interior, Commerce and Energy, as well as the EPA, water programs and federal science initiatives through the end of the current fiscal year.
- While six of the 12 annual bills are now completed, it still represents just a fraction of government funding measures Congress must pass ahead of the month-end deadline to avert another shutdown after last year's record-breaking funding lapse.
- The two biggest appropriations bills are not yet completed: LHHS-Education, which

higher education tracks most closely and Defense.
- Lawmakers are optimistic that the text of another spending package funding Defense, Transportation-HUD, and Labor-HHS-Education could be released in the middle of the upcoming long weekend.
- The Homeland Security funding package, however, remains in limbo, complicated by ongoing tensions in Minnesota over ICE operations.
- The bipartisan product the Senate passed Thursday afternoon largely rejects the dramatic cuts requested by the White House, instead making more restrained spending reductions to energy, science research, and environment programs.

House Passes Two-Bill Minibus with State-Foreign Ops and Financial Services Bills

- The House passed a two-bill government spending package Wednesday as Congress races to clear as many funding bills as possible ahead of the Jan. 30 deadline to avoid a shutdown.
- Members voted 341-79 to pass the measure, which would fund the departments of State and Treasury through September, along with the IRS, the judiciary and the Federal Trade Commission through the end of the current fiscal year.
- The State, Foreign Operations bill provides funding for three higher education priority accounts, initially targeted by the Trump Administration when U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) was shut down:

- The *Higher Education* account, which was formerly under the USAID's Development Assistance line (-25% compared to FY25 enacted).
- *Feed the Future Innovation Labs*, which were formerly at USAID and now within the State Department (held flat from FY25).
- Department of State's *Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program* (-5.8% compared to FY25 enacted).

- Exact funding levels are provided in APLU's analysis, while additional historical funding information is published on the association's website. APLU's analysis also contains information on policy language of interest.
- **Latest on Indirect Costs:** While the Financial Services bill does not contain key higher education funding accounts, the Joint Explanatory Statement (JES) contains policy language directing the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) not to take any action that would change the indirect costs model in effect during FY24.
- Additionally, the JES directs OMB to engage in discussions with the Committees on improvements to the system to identify and recover indirect costs, specifically noting the FAIR model.
- The full text is provided in APLU's tracker of F&A language in all appropriations bills.

Pregnant Students' Rights Act on House Floor Next Week (Courtesy Politico)

- Today, the House Rules Committee on Tuesday will consider the Pregnant Students' Rights Act.
- The bill would require colleges to advise pregnant students of their rights, required accommodations and other services. It cleared the House Education and Workforce Committee last week on a 21-15 party-line vote.
- House Republicans lauded the bill, saying it will help pregnant students know their rights and make informed decisions. Democrats criticized the bill, saying it only required institutions to share information that encourages students to carry a pregnancy to term, and not letting them know all their options.

State Department to Pause Immigrant Visa Processing from 75 Countries (Courtesy APLU)

- Wednesday, the State Department announced it will pause immigrant visa processing from 75 countries.
- The pause will last "until the U.S. can ensure that new immigrants will not extract wealth from the American people." Initial media reports suggested the pause was for all visa classifications, not just immigrant visas, but the limitation was later clarified.
- The pause will start on Jan. 21. While the announcement only applies to immigrant visas, there may be indirect impacts on individuals seeking nonimmigrant visas like F-1s.

Higher Education Staff at ED Moves to Labor (Courtesy Politico)

- The Education Department on Thursday announced it is sending agency staff over to the Labor Department to coordinate on higher education programs.
- Starting next week, staff in the Office of Postsecondary Education's Higher Education Programs division will be detailed over to Labor.
- They will be tasked with helping programs receiving federal cash transition to Labor's grants and payments systems — a move that was executed with career and technical education initiatives last year.
- The move is a key part of the Trump administration's goal to eliminate the Education Department.
- While President Donald Trump cannot eliminate the agency without congressional approval, his administration has started to outsource the agency's critical responsibilities to other federal agencies through intergovernmental agreements.
- These agreements are designed to prove to Congress that federal education programs can still operate without the Education Department.

AHEAD Negotiated Rulemaking Committee Reaches Consensus (Courtesy APLU)

- Last Friday, the U.S. Department of Education's AHEAD negotiated rulemaking committee reached consensus on a package of proposed regulations implementing the accountability provisions of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OB3).
- The legislation enacted an accountability mechanism in which bachelors' recipients must earn more than a high school graduate four years post completion, and graduate degree recipients must earn more than a bachelors' recipient in their field.
- The agreed upon text represents a compromise between the Department of Education's base position and proposals offered by negotiators.
- Per the consensus language, programs that fail to pass the earnings premium metric in two of three academic years lose access to the Direct Loan program.
- The policy is inclusive of degree and certificate programs. Pell eligibility is not at stake in this earnings premium test. However, the committee added additional language that would remove all Title IV access from institutions in which 50% of their students and 50% of their Pell funds are within programs that fail to pass the earnings premium metric in two of three years.
- Inclusion of this provision was needed to garner committee consensus.
- The committee also adopted a provision that would allow students at an institution that voluntarily ends a program that fails to meet the earnings premium metric after one year to retain access to Direct Loans as they complete the program.
- The Department is aiming to finalize provisions included in the AHEAD and RISE negotiated rulemakings as quickly as possible to meet a July 1, 2026, deadline for implementation.

HHS Reinstates Grants One Day After Terminating Them (Courtesy Politico)

- The Department of Health and Human Services has reinstated nearly 3,000 substance use disorder and mental health services grants worth nearly $2 billion a day after terminating them, according to three sources with knowledge of the matter.
- The cuts targeted discretionary grants from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, an HHS agency, and included youth overdose prevention and medication-assisted treatment for substance use disorder, among other things.
- Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut, the top Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee, said in a statement late Wednesday that Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. had reinstated the grants.
- “Congress holds the power of the purse, and the Secretary must follow the law,” she said, adding that the cuts would have eliminated programs that save lives.
- A bipartisan group of 100 House members wrote to Kennedy Wednesday asking for more information about the terminations.

Upcoming Events of Interest

*Senate is in recess next week; House is in session

1/20/26 03:00 PM EST
Meeting: House Rules Committee
The House Rules Committee meets to formulate a rule on H.R. 6945 (119), the "Supporting Pregnant and Parenting Women and Families Act"; H.R. 6359 (119), the "Pregnant Students' Rights Act"; H.J.Res. 140 (119), providing for congressional disapproval under chapter 8 of title 5, United States Code, of the rule submitted by the Bureau of Land Management relating to Public Land Order No. 7917 for Withdrawal of Federal Lands - Cook, Lake, and Saint Louis Counties, MN.
1/21/26 11:00 AM EST
Event: The Center for American Progress
The Center for American Progress holds an event on "Putting Students Before Politics: A Conversation on the Future of America's Education System."
01/21/26 02:30 PM EST
Hearing: House Veterans' Affairs Committee
The House Veterans' Affairs Economic Opportunity Subcommittee holds a hearing on H.R. 982 (119), the "Warriors to Workforce Act"; H.R. 2878 (119), the "Daniel J. Harvey, Jr. and Adam Lambert Improving Servicemember Transition to Reduce Veteran Suicide Act"; H.R. 4105 (119), the "VET Act of 2025"; H.R. 5634 (119), the "Veterans Flight Training Responsibility Act of 2025"; H.R. 3159 (119), the "Improving SCRA (Servicemembers Civil Relief Act) Benefit Utilization Act"; H.R. 5436 (119), to amend title 38, United States Code, to prohibit an educational institution from withholding a transcript from an individual who pursued a course or program of education at such institution using Post-9/11 educational assistance; legislation to amend title 38, United States Code, to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to submit to Congress a quarterly report on housing loans insured, guaranteed, or under laws administered by the Secretary; the "Centralized Reimbursement for Upgraded Innovative Service Equipmen Act"; the "Improving Mental Health Care and Coordination for Homeless Veterans Act"; the "Improving Emerging Tech Opportunities for Veterans Act"; the "Affordable Housing Guarantee Act"; and the "Veteran Housing Promise Act."
1/22/26 12:45 PM EST
Forum: The American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research
The American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research holds a forum on "Parental Rights in Education after Mahmoud v. Taylor: Legal and Cultural Assessments."

2026 NHA Annual Meeting & Humanities Advocacy Day
March 8-10, 2026
National Humanities Alliance
Registration Required
This event will provide an opportunity to connect with other passionate humanities advocates from around the country. During the Annual Meeting, the National Humanities Alliance will explore approaches to year-round advocacy on college campuses and in local communities, while also preparing for visits to Capitol Hill. On Humanities Advocacy Day, participants meet with House and Senate offices to make a persuasive case for federal funding for the humanities.

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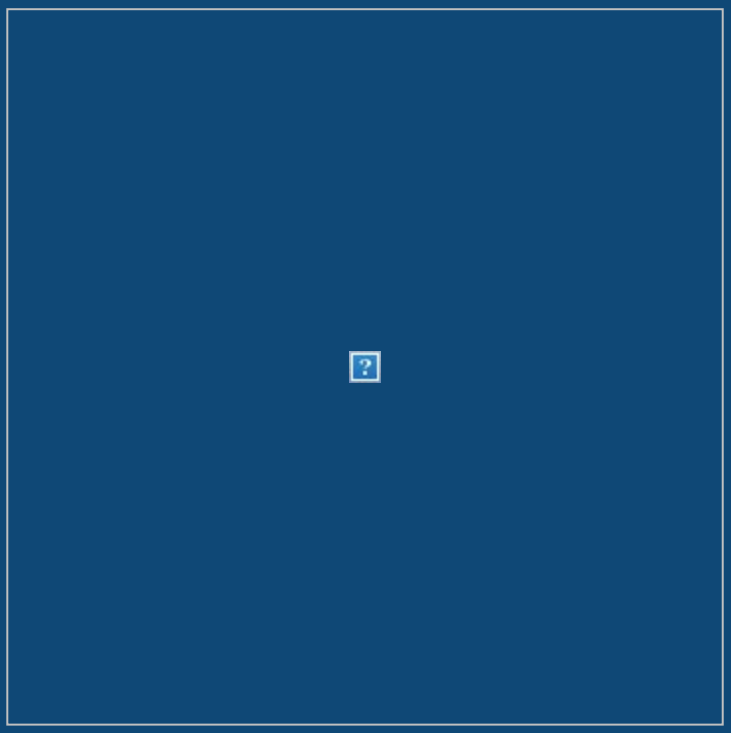

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